



Representative

Renee Radcliff



21st District 1997 Session Report

Spring 1997

Dear friends,

What an exciting year it was in Olympia! We accomplished many good things this session for the state and for the people of the 21st District, including historic revisions of the welfare and juvenile justice systems. We completed a budget that is \$112 million below the Initiative 601 spending limit. We also adjourned on time — a remarkable feat given that the last time the Legislature adjourned on time in a budget year was 1957. All things considered, this was definitely a session to write home about.

The only mandatory item we had to accomplish was writing the spending plan for the next two years to pay for programs and services for Washington citizens. In the end, we passed a \$19.073 billion budget with bipartisan support from the Legislature and the governor. This is a very responsible budget that is committed to our state's K-12 and higher education needs. It funds essential services for people in need, offers meaningful tax relief and provides a fiscally responsible ending fund balance.

There were other challenges along the way. Besides the budget, we set out to address a number of other pressing issues, including transportation funding, public safety, regulatory reform and plans for a new Seahawks stadium. The specifics of the budget and other topics are highlighted in this report.

Finally, I want to thank everyone who contacted my office during the session. I need your ideas to represent you effectively in the Legislature. I hope you find this report informative and I look forward to your responses. It is an honor serving the people of the 21st District.

Sincerely,

Renee Radcliff
State Representative

Committees:
Higher Education, *vice chair*
Transportation Policy and Budget
Law and Justice

Protecting taxpayers, reshaping government and prioritizing education

With total spending of \$19.073 billion over the next two years, the state operating budget adopted by the Legislature for the 1997-99 biennium meets our commitment to protect taxpayers by limiting the size and scope of government.

The budget represents an increase of 7.7 percent over the current level — the smallest growth in 26 years — and continues our successful efforts to make government more accountable and responsive to the individuals and families of Washington. And by keeping spending more than \$112 million below the limit established by Initiative 601, we ensure that the budget will be kept under control now and in the future.

Education is the first budget priority. Funding for K-12 education was enhanced \$288 million, including \$59 million in grants for technology and instructional materials — about \$458 per average size classroom.

We also increased access to higher education, boosting enrollments by nearly 6,400, continuing support for workforce training programs at the two-year colleges to serve up to 7,200 individuals, and increasing student financial aid to help students from low- and middle-income families.

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Legislative Hotline: 1-800-562-6000

Enhancing higher education

A world-class education is largely dependent on access to a world-class education system. The Legislature sought ways of strengthening and expanding our state's higher education programs this session. Besides increasing enrollment and the availability of financial aid, we approved a capital budget that addresses the physical needs of our universities, community colleges and technical schools. The capital budget includes \$546 million in construction dollars to institutions of higher education for upgrades to teaching and research space — \$180 million of which will fund projects at community colleges and technical schools.

A bill I sponsored, HB 1647, gives students financial flexibility when opting to study abroad. It allows institutions to enter into agreements with out-of-state institutions at which the student will pay either the resident tuition rates of their home state or the resident tuition rate of the institution they would like to attend as an exchange student. *HB 1647 is now before the governor.*

Finally, legislation to create an advanced college tuition payment program was approved. The program will allow parents to purchase tuition units now that would be redeemable for future tuition at any Washington college or university. For more information, contact the Higher Education Coordinating Board at (360) 753-7800.

Welfare reform requires personal responsibility

After 60 years, three generations of a welfare system that promoted dependency upon government, the 1997 Legislature adopted a historic new public assistance plan that will empower people to lift themselves out of despair, dependency and poverty and into self-sufficiency and economic independence.

This year's welfare reform plan represents a significant philosophical shift in how best to help those in need. Welfare will no longer be a one-way handout. Now, personal responsibility and accountability will be required of recipients. And, by focusing on the causes of achievement and success, like individual initiative, aspiration and hard work, opportunity will also increase.

All able adults will be required to work or perform community service in exchange for benefits. And all teen recipients will be required to live at home or in another state-approved setting and be actively progressing toward a high school degree.

Promoting efficiency in government

The House focused its regulatory reform efforts this session on limiting the rule-making authority of agencies and dealing with rules already in place. Our major regulatory reform bill, HB 1032, requires agencies to review existing rules within seven years of adoption or they expire. This measure is now before the governor.

Another measure, HB 1190, follows up on legislation we enacted in 1996, implementing performance audits. This bill requires agencies or local governments that have undergone performance audits to produce a preliminary report on their compliance with the final audit findings. HB 1190 has been sent to the governor.



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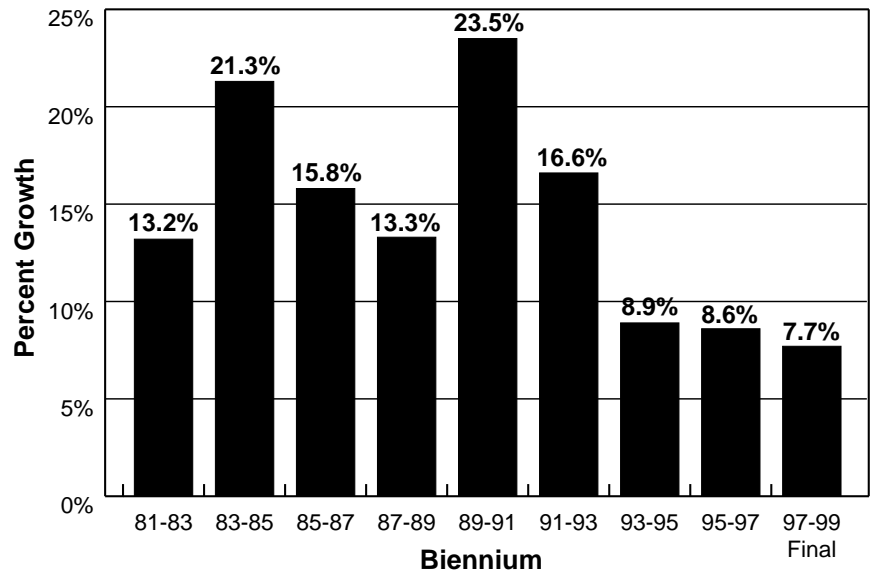
A bare-bones transportation budget

The Legislature approved a \$3.3 billion two-year transportation spending plan this session. It is a bare-bones budget that does not include a gas tax increase. As a member of the House Transportation Policy and Budget Committee, it was difficult to support a budget that I knew could be damaging not only to the state's infrastructure, but to its economic viability as well.

I share concerns over the efficient use of our tax dollars, and worked with the committee to identify nearly \$200 million in efficiencies and cost savings in this budget. I also voted to include a \$1.5 million performance audit of the Department of Transportation, the State Patrol and the Department of Licensing. These savings are important, but I fear they may not be enough to cover the cost of serious transportation improvements, given the projected 20-year population increase for our state.

While the 1997-99 transportation budget funds the continuation and completion of ongoing transportation projects and programs, no funding was provided to begin new projects. The highway preservation projects are fully funded, and first priority is given to the safety and maintenance of our highways, roads, bridges and ferries.

General Fund Expenditures
Biennial Percent Growth



Strengthening public schools



Ensuring that our children have the basic skills and knowledge they need to be successful was a high priority this year for the Legislature.

As an example, the state operating budget we adopted increases support for education and new school construction, while taking steps to ensure that more resources are directed into the classroom to improve teaching and help students learn.

In an effort to return to the fundamentals of basic education, we also adopted legislation to help schools do a better job of teaching reading in the earliest grades. And we adopted legislation giving educators the tools and authority to maintain greater discipline in the classroom, as well as free local schools from unnecessary and excessive government regulations that thwart efforts to improve education.

I introduced legislation (HB 1378) to give students with different learning needs an alternative to traditional education settings. This measure allows school districts to contract out for educational services needed by students with special learning needs, including drop-outs and at-risk students. *This measure was incorporated into another education bill (HB 1581) which did pass the Legislature and is now before the governor.*

Protecting our communities from juvenile crime

This year, the Legislature succeeded in enacting a juvenile justice reform measure — the most significant changes in 20 years — that will make a real difference both in protecting the public and in reducing the number of teens who become career criminals.

Our reform plan ensures that those hardcore juvenile offenders who commit violent crimes will be safely locked away in a secure correctional facility, where they belong, by broadening the law that tries and sentences them as adults. Now, teens who commit drive-by shootings, first-degree robbery, first-degree child rape, or any crime when armed with a firearm will be prosecuted and sentenced as adults.

It also provides greater flexibility for prosecutors and judges to deal with juvenile offenders so that every youngster who breaks the law receives an appropriate combination of punishment and/or rehabilitation. Alternative sentencing options are encouraged, including boot camps, home detention, mandatory alcohol and drug treatment, and community service.



Rep. Radcliff took an active role in the development of this year's juvenile justice reform measure as a member of the House Law and Justice Committee.